

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS

FOR AMBASSADOR JORDEN FROM BELL

FOLLOWING EXCHANGE TOOK PLACE AT STATE DEPARTMENT NOON
BRIEFING, SEPTEMBER 22:

Q: HAVE WE TOLD PANAMA THAT WE WANT TO DEFEND THE PANAMA
CANAL FOR AN INDEFINITE TIME?

A: OUR POSITION ON THE NEGOTIATIONS IS AS STATED IN THE
STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES, SIGNED BY THE SECRETARY AND THE
PANAMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ON FEBRUARY 7TH, 1974.

Q: HOW ABOUT ADDRESSING THAT DIRECT QUESTION CONCERNING
THE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL?

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A: I THINK IT IS ALL CONTAINED IN THAT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE, GEORGE.

Q: BOB, THE SECRETARY OF STATE, IN RECENT DAYS, HAS APPARENTLY AMENDED THAT STATEMENT -- OR DON'T HIS PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS MEAN ANYTHING?

A: HIS STATEMENT DID NOT AMEND THAT. I THINK IF YOU WILL READ THE WHOLE --

Q: WHEN HE SAID "UNILATERAL AND INDEFINITE?"

A: IF YOU READ THE WHOLE CONTEXT OF HIS ANSWER, IT CERTAINLY DID NOT AMEND IT. AND OUR NEGOTIATING POSITION REMAINS THE SAME.

Q: HOW LONG DO WE WANT TO RETAIN THE RIGHT TO DEFEND THE CANAL?

A: YOU KNOW WE ARE NEGOTIATING A TREATY WITH PANAMA, AND WE HAVE NOT --

Q: DON'T WE HAVE A DESIRE --

A: -- COMPLETED THOSE NEGOTIATIONS.

Q: DON'T WE HAVE A POSITION -- A DESIRE? HOW LONG WE WANT TO DEFEND THE CANAL?

A: YOU KNOW IT JUST IS NOT POSSIBLE TO COMMENT ON VARIOUS REPORTS THAT ARE COMING OUT ON THESE NEGOTIATIONS. IF WE ARE NEGOTIATING --

BUT FROM THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS RATHER OFFICIAL, FROM SATURDAY -- COULD YOU COMMENT ON THAT?

A: THIS IS PRETTY MUCH IN THE SAME VEIN, DAVID. WHEN YOU ARE DEALING WITH A SUBJECT AS COMPLEX AS PANAMA OBVIOUSLY A TREATY CANNOT BE BROUGHT INTO EXISTENCE INSTANTLY. IT HAS TO BE NEGOTIATED.

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AND PUBLICATION OF WHAT PURPORTS TO BE THE POSITION OF ONE OR BOTH PARTIES, CAN HINDER THAT BALANCING OF MUTUAL INTERESTS WHICH MAKES ANY SUCH TREATY POSSIBLE.

Q: WELL DO YOU, --

Q: CAN I JUST FOLLOW UP ON THAT?
DOS THIS MEAN THAT THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE STATE

DEPARTMENT CONSIDER THE STATEMENT, AS ISSUED BY JUAN ANTONIO TACK, AS HINDERING THAT PROCESS OF BALANCING?

A: I HAVE STATED THOSE WORDS RATHER CAREFULLY. AND I THINK I WILL JUST LEAVE IT AT THAT POINT, AND STATE THAT IN LIGHT OF THAT, AND IN LIGHT OF THE FACT THAT PUBLICATIONS OF THIS KIND MIGHT HINDER THAT BALANCING OF MUTUAL INTERESTS -- FOR THAT REASON WE DO NOT INTEND TO COMMENT

ON THIS KIND OF REPORT.

AS I SAID EARLIER, IN ANSWER TO GEORGE GEDDA'S QUESTION, THE BASIS OF OUR POSITION REMAINS AS STATED IN THE STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES, WHICH SECRETARY KISSINGER AND FOREIGN MINISTER TACK SIGNED. THERE REMAINS A GOOD DEAL TO BE DONE. WE ARE ASSESSING THE SITUATION NOW TO SEE WHERE WE ARE, AND WE WILL BE CONSULTING FURTHER WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS.

MEANWHILE, AS PREVIOUSLY PLANNED, THE DEPUTY NEGOTIATOR OF OUR DELEGATION, MR. BELL, WILL BE RETURNING TO PANAMA LATER THIS WEEK.

Q: WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE IN THE NEAR FUTURE TO HAVE A BACKGROUND MEETING WITH MR. BUNKER?

A: I WILL ASK HIM. I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER HE WOULD FEEL, AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTION IN THE NEGOTIATIONS IF HE IS ABLE TO DO THAT. BUT I CERTAINLY WILL RELAY YOUR QUESTION.

Q: WHAT IS MR. BELL'S FIRST NAME?

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A: MOREY. S. MOREY BELL.

Q: THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF SPECULATION THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD JUST AS SOON CONCLUDE THE DRAFT TREATY NEGOTIATION AFTER THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION -- TO AVOID THIS BECOMING AN ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN. WHAT IS THE LINE ON THAT?

A: I CAN ONLY STATE THAT WE ARE IN SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT AND WE ARE TRYING TO REACH AN AGREEMENT.

Q: AS SOON AS POSSIBLE?

A: SURE. INGERSOLL

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